



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 13, 2019

VA announces proposal to increase access to dental care

WASHINGTON – Today the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has submitted to Congress a waiver request and pilot program under Section 152 of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 ([MISSION Act](#)) to improve access to dental care for Veterans.

The MISSION Act authorizes VA to submit statutory waivers to Congress for the purpose of testing innovative service delivery models to improve the quality of care for America's Veterans. Under existing statute, VA has limited authority to provide dental services for Veterans. With this waiver request, VA is submitting a proposal to increase access to dental services for enrolled Veterans ineligible for dental services through VA by connecting them with community-based, pro bono or discounted dental service providers.

"The MISSION Act gave Veterans real choice over their healthcare decisions," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert L. Wilkie. "Through this pilot proposal, we want to ensure Veterans have access to quality dental care through a network of providers who are proud to serve America's heroes."

Poor oral health can have a significant negative effect on overall health. Clinical research has found possible connections between gum problems and heart disease, bacterial pneumonia, and stroke. Upon approval of this pilot, VA will work with groups such as the American Dental Association and Federally Qualified Health Centers across the U.S. to offer pro bono and discounted dental services to Veterans.

"This waiver submission opens the door to years of groundbreaking innovation under the MISSION Act to improve care for our Veterans, who are top of mind for this President and this Administration every single day," said Director Joe Grogan of the White House Domestic Policy Council.

Section 152 of the MISSION Act led VA to establish a Center for Care and Payment Innovation to test payment and service delivery models, with the goal of reducing expenditures while preserving or enhancing the quality of care for Veterans. In implementing this section, the Secretary was granted authority to waive statutory requirements that may impede innovative approaches upon notification of and approval from Congress. The dental care proposal, titled the Care Coordination for Dental Benefits demonstration project under the Community Provider Collaborations for Veterans Pilot Program, is the first waiver request and pilot program submitted to Congress under this authority.

The VA Innovation Center, led by Michael Akinyele, is implementing Section 152 of the VA MISSION Act under the Office of Enterprise Integration. VA published a proposed rule ([RIN 2900-AQ56](#)) establishing the Center for Innovation for Care and Payment on July 29, 2019 (84 FR 36507). VA published a final rule implementing its authority on October 25, 2019; this rule became effective on November 25, 2019. "This pilot program enables us to explore leading practices across the U.S. health care system to meet Veterans needs today and into the future," said Dr. Melissa S. Glynn, Assistant Secretary for Enterprise Integration.

VA will publish details of the Community Provider Collaborations for Veterans pilot program for public comment in the [Federal Register](#).

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